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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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12*th June*, 1946

DEAR MEMBER,

The Charter of the British Broadcasting Corporation expires at the end of the year. Important decisions will have to be taken shortly about the future of broadcasting in this country. Radio is generally acknowledged to be equal in importance with the cinema and the press in its influence, actual and potential, on public opinion, taste and behaviour, and the question of the renewal of the Charter is therefore one of considerable public concern. The Government has decided against the appointment of a commission to review B.B.C. activities, but there will be a debate in the House of Commons.

THE RENEWAL OF THE B.B.C. CHARTER

The first remark to be made on the subject is so simple that it can easily be overlooked. The important thing about broadcasting is what comes over the air, what the public hears and (as it soon will) sees. The *content* of broadcasting is the important thing, and discussions about the relative merits of monopoly broadcasting, sponsored (i.e. commercial and advertising) radio or a mixture of the two are largely academic unless they centre on the question how the framework will affect the content.

At the present moment it looks as though the decision will be in favour of continuing the B.B.C. monopoly and renewing its Charter. The public grumbles at the B.B.C., but on the whole trusts it; its tradition has been good and its war-time record has inspired confidence. There is considerable public distaste compounded of reason and prejudice, for at least two of the possible alternatives. State broadcasting has an evil history, and commercial broadcasting has very few supporters in this country, where those who discuss it tend to underline its drawbacks and minimize its advantages.

If there is a strong probability that the B.B.C. Charter will be renewed on much the same terms as at present, it is not any too early to begin asking what are the drawbacks of monopoly broadcasting and how they can be reduced to a minimum.

In its early days the B.B.C. catered for a minority in the nation. Radio was a novelty, listeners were confined to those who could afford a receiving set, experiment was welcomed and blemishes were condoned. In such conditions the advantages of a monopoly were considerable, and because it was able to pursue its way undis-

tracted by questions of competition and profit-making, there emerged within the B.B.C., under the directorship of Lord Reith, a policy which aimed at giving the listening public something rather better than it might think it liked. The B.B.C. played an unquestionably great part in raising standards of taste.

But this situation has undergone radical change. The listening public is now co-terminous with the nation itself. The invention of the loudspeaker made listening in public places by large audiences a possibility. The fall in the price of receiving sets, opportunities for renting them and perhaps even more the device of re-diffusion, by which in many towns a choice of not more than two stations is relayed to thousands of homes by overhead wires from a central receiving set, brought the radio to all but the very poorest.

A monopoly which has to cater for a whole nation and beyond is beset by temptations which do not affect a monopoly catering for a minority. Listeners pay their pound and expect their twenty shillings' worth. There is, therefore, a constant pull towards pleasing the majority. The B.B.C. has a listener research department with a headquarters staff of over sixty people which applies sampling techniques to the study of listeners' habits, tastes and opinions. It conducts a continuous survey of the quantity of listening for which it makes 3,000 interviews every day. It has also set up listening panels to whom it sends questionnaires about the reaction of listeners to various broadcasts. It is only natural that the programme directors should be sensitive to these responses. When less care was taken to gauge public reaction, those who disliked the diet of the B.B.C. tuned in to Radio Luxemburg and listened to light entertainment provided by commercial firms, most of them British. Before the war the bulk of the listening public listened on Sundays to this programme. The present B.B.C. Light programme to which about 52 per cent of the listening public tune in on week-days and 60 per cent on Sundays, is the B.B.C's attempt to combat that commercial broadcasting.

The broad policy of the B.B.C. is, therefore, to strike a balance between giving people what they know they want, and giving them what they can be persuaded to like if it is presented in the right way. Listener research may develop into majority rule unless those who plan programmes can assert their independence and rise above it. They can only do this if the more active section of the public with ideas and opinions assert themselves against the dead weight of those who only know what they dislike. Many of those who make up the opinion-forming section of society do not take radio seriously : they take a pride in their expressed attitude, "I never listen to anything but the news." Anybody with ideas ought to be hammering on the doors of the B.B.C. to get himself heard on the air, and

turning to radio as a means of expression of those ideas, quite as much as to print.

The second question raised by the existence of the monopoly is whether there is, or can be, genuine freedom of speech. The B.B C's policy is to hold the balance between extremes. Any speaker with a bias in one direction is balanced by another, as in the broadcast of election speeches. What the B.B.C. has in fact supported and with very considerable success is not so much free speech as fair speech, for there are certain points of view which are rigorously excluded and certain subjects which are taboo. No public issue, for example, which is before Parliament may be debated on the air until after the debate in the House unless Government permission is first obtained. This does not debar from debate public issues which are looming on the horizon, and will not be legislated upon for some time, but it does mean that immediate issues are left to be debated solely through the press—a matter which sooner or later may cause a government some concern.

BROADCASTING AND RELIGION

Both these issues which we have so far raised, that of pleasing the public, and that of ensuring freedom of expression, are acutely present in the question of religious broadcasting. If we accept the rather generous estimate of 15 per cent of the population as Church going and regard religious broadcasting as the taste of that minority, then we have to admit at once that religion is in a favoured position in Broadcasting House.

Such a position of privilege cannot possibly be justified on the grounds that a minority in the nation holds clearly expressed views on religion. It can only be justified on two grounds. First, that in so far as it has never been ousted from the position, the Christian religion is a part of the fabric of the life of this country, implicit rather than explicit in many of our social institutions and habits, and entitled to a place within a national institution such as the B.B.C. Secondly, religious broadcasting can only justify the amount of time given to it if it is constantly stretching out and attempting to enlarge its listening audience. We received in this office recently an account of an evangelistic campaign in a small town. The writer admitted at the end of the account that the audiences were poor and the visible results nil, "nevertheless" he continued, "the Gospel was faithfully preached and if it was rejected the preachers were not to blame." This describes a position which a religious broadcasting department cannot possibly adopt, for it has always to conform to two standards. First, is this Christian truth? and second, is this good radio? A section of the Christian public find something shocking in the introduction of a technical standard, and we can see the results in bad music and bad art within the Churches. But in

reality the introduction of a second standard increases the effectiveness of the first. There has been no better evangelism or Christian education done through the medium of radio than Miss Dorothy Sayers' plays, "The Man born to be King," which any radio expert would admit to be good radio. This scrupulous attention to technical standards of excellence is one of the things which the Church badly needs to-day, for the old fallacy that there is something specially holy about the mediocre dies extremely hard.

Broadcasting is one of the few places where the Church is being compelled to work in a context where technical excellence is an ever-present criterion. The task of finding preachers and speakers who are as good at their own job, and as adaptable to the demands of radio technique as artists in secular spheres is extremely difficult. But the religious broadcasting department has shown its ability to expand its audience by the constant use of new techniques—drama, schools services, dramatized sermons and discussions.

THE DUAL ROLE OF RELIGION

In its relation to religion the B.B.C. is a microcosm of society. That is to say, there are two ways of looking at the function of religion and both of these are reflected in the mixture of rôles assigned to religion within the B.B.C. One view of religion regards it as part of the foundation of British life. For this reason it may not be attacked by any broadcaster. This conception of it also accounts for the fact that religious broadcasting is confined to the main religious elements in the British tradition—Anglican, Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic and orthodox dissent. These four not only make up the main pattern of religious life throughout the country, but underlie the political alignments which make the British party system unique. On this view of religion all non-orthodox dissent—Unitarianism, Christian Science, Oxford Group, Seventh Day Adventist and all smaller sects are excluded from the air.

The other view of religion is that it is a small section of life of interest only to a minority in the nation and must, therefore, be kept confined in its own department. This view can be seen in the B.B.C. in attempts to keep religion in its own department, where in the view of some it ought to be. There has been a lowering of the barriers of late, as the religious broadcasting department has worked jointly with the drama department, schools broadcasts and the children's hour for religious broadcasts within those programmes.

If Christians regard themselves as a fighting minority who must crash their way into every department of broadcasting and regard every new entry as an assult landing on alien soil, they will naturally meet with resentment. It is only in accepting the first view of the place of religion which assumes that no schools broadcast or children's hour is complete without the religious element, that there lies any

way forward from this departmentalizing of religion evident in many quarters in society, which wants to shut religion into a corner alone.

SHARPENING THE ISSUES

Religious broadcasting has, therefore, to try to do two things: to show religion as the active faith of a minority, and to stretch out to that majority for whom Christianity is an ethic and a part of their British way of life. But the real question is not so much how one can reconcile these two (which is difficult enough seeing that the language of the minority is incomprehensible to the majority) but whether and how this second function of religion can be given a real cutting-edge. What provides a cutting-edge is the sharpening power of controversy. But radio is not the medium through which the faith of the active minority, that is, the historic creeds, Biblical truth and the order of the Church can be debated and justified by argument. It is impossible for the Christian to enter into a brief public debate on, say, the Virgin Birth, the Holy Spirit or the validity of the Sacraments, for the reason that God himself never asks any man to believe any one of these things in isolation. Asked to defend them the Christian must set them in the context of the whole faith and the whole life of the Church where alone they have meaning. The items of Christian belief are indefensible by the spoken word except as parts of a whole, which take weeks to develop, and one can imagine few types of broadcast more futile than an argument about a single tenet of the faith ending in a balanced summary by the chairman.

There is, however, an area of controversy which is always developing in real life, as the layman is acutely aware, which might well be reflected in broadcasting. There are points where Christian behaviour comes into sharp conflict with other behaviour. Sooner or later, for example, Christians have to face the fact that they are in a minority in upholding as conscious ideals, the virtues of chastity and fidelity. While they have the support of a large number of people who are continent and faithful by habit, inclination or lack of temptation, on the far side of that mass lies an active antagonistic minority prepared to do battle in favour of free experimentation. A recent radio discussion on the subject of sex relations aroused loud protest from the Churches. It is the purest ostrich wisdom for the Church to close its eyes to the fact that this debate is going on in thousands of people's lives every day. The real objection to the broadcast in question was in our view not that the issue was debated, but that the suggestion of experimental sexual relationships before marriage was put forward anonymously and irresponsibly, and the Christian case was left in the hands of light-weight defendants who had no idea how to use the broadcasting medium. Only when it is challenged does the case for Christian behaviour develop in all its

strength and power, and the suspicion grows in many quarters that Christians evade the fight because they are uncertain of their weapons.

There is another field in which there is room through the medium of radio, not so much for debate in the sense of head-on collision between opposing points of view as for debate in the sense of conversation between exponents of ideas and conceptions. It is difficult to explain what is meant because the idea is new in broadcasting. It has made its appearance and with marked success in the recent series broadcast at 9.15 on Sunday evenings and called "The Challenge of our Time." In this series eleven eminent men were given a quarter of an hour apiece in which to develop their own ideas about the fundamental questions which the contemporary world presents to mankind. They were not asked either to support or to condemn Christianity, dogmatic or ethical. "I would ask you to notice," said Professor Ritchie, near the end of the series, "that it is Polanyi, the man of science, who says explicitly that our hope lies in Christianity." Here the Christian viewpoint meets its competitors not in argument with each other, but in a discussion about large matters where Christianity is mediated through the minds of certain of the disputants.

Religion is forced into a false position if it is confined behind the doors of the religious broadcasting department. Both the manner and the content of Christian apologetic will change for the better when religion speaks again, not only through the voice of the clerics in their unanswerable pulpits, but through the voices of men of science, artists and laymen of all kinds, for whom religion is something which is rarely expressed in theological language, but always indirectly mediated through their life's work and through the language which that work teaches them to speak. It is greatly to be hoped that religious broadcasting will develop within the department along the sound lines which have been laid down. But this new development of encounter between the faith and other points of view, even if it sharpens to brusquer attack than was evident in this latest series, brings religion into the converse of ordinary men.

THE SUPPLEMENT

Father Jarrett-Kerr is a young member of the Mirfield Community, whose work now lies mainly with students.

Yours sincerely,

Kathleen Bliss

ON OUR BEST BEHAVIOUR

BY M. JARRETT-KERR, C.R.

There are roughly three ways of commending Christian morals : (1) " Be good, because God says you must." (2) " Be good, because it is better for society as a whole." And (3) " Be good, because it's more fun." No doubt (1) is the most correct, but it is not necessarily incompatible with (2) or (3), which, if true, help to make (1) more acceptable. Probably (2) has, consciously or unconsciously, been that most commonly employed, and it seems more demonstrably true than (3). Thus, to take a concrete example, we might say (1) " Be sexually moral, because God tells you to " ; (2) " Be sexually moral, because that is better for everybody all round "—more often in the form, " Don't be promiscuous, because that leads to social degeneration " ; and (3) " Be sexually moral because it's more fun." This last sounds absurd. We shall see later whether it really is so. But even (2) is less easy to maintain now-a-days ; not because it is not true, for its truth seems to be reinforced by sociologist after sociologist whether Christian or not, but because it does not strike us with the same compelling force as it struck our grandparents or great-grandparents living in an age of (apparently) greater stability. The hovering threat of the atom bomb only gives material vindication to the general feeling which was already there among us that western civilization is in too great peril for long-term plans to seem very important. Why worry about what is better for society as a whole, if society as a whole may now blow up at any moment or starve at any winter ?

This sort of question is, perhaps, not very often expressed. It may be a pity that it does not come to the surface more frequently. Even those whom one would expect to find asking it do not appear to be much bothered with it. Most students at college, for instance, do not seem to be much exercised by the atom bomb or the possible wind-up of the west, so far as I can judge from contacts with one " Red-Brick " university and from a Mission recently conducted in another. Probably the main reason for this is simply an impotence of the imagination ; these threats to civilization seem so vast and ungovernable that the mind—especially the mind of an immature and lecture-congested student—cannot compass them, just as it is impossible to picture to oneself what " light years " may mean ; and therefore these considerations are, deliberately or not, put aside in favour of more parochial concerns. This motive is not all bad ; but there is an element of ultimate irresponsibility in it which makes it harder to present such students with any recommendations for Christian morality. And what is true of students may be more or

less true of society around them. Nevertheless, the sense of uncertainty and futility attaching to any long-term planning if not often expressed, is still there beneath. And the deeper it lies, the harder it becomes for the (2) method of presenting Christian morality to have any clear appeal.

PROFESSOR HALDANE AND MRS. GRUNDY

The most impenitent employers of this (2) method are, of course, not Christians at all, but the " scientonomists " (if one may coin a bi-lingual monstrosity ; we need a word for that limited section of the scientific world whose science is their law and their faith). But for them (2) is really a mere truism—what philosophers call a " tautology "—since " moral behaviour " is already in their view synonymous with " doing what is better for society as a whole " ; therefore, to say that " You ought to be moral because it is better for society as a whole," is only to say, " You ought to do what is better for society as a whole, because that is better for society as a whole." A pretty example occurred in Professor Haldane's contribution to the recent interesting series of broadcasts on " The Challenge of Our Time." He claimed that science has simplified our moral problems, not complicated them, since the development of scientific warfare will now oblige man and nations to behave " morally " if he and they are to survive. This is, incidentally, a curious reversion to a Mrs. Grundy conception of morality ; usually it is Christians who are accused of attaching ethics too closely to rewards and punishments! But that is by the way. The main defect of Professor Haldane's view is its implication that morality merely means doing or not doing certain actions, quite apart from motive. He may be right that science is forcing nations to " behave morally " (i.e. to refrain from making war upon each other) ; it is tempting to hope that he is right. But to imagine that " not to make war " is the total equivalent of moral behaviour even for nations, much less for individuals, is to fail to see the trees for the wood. Certainly if there should be any flaw in Professor Haldane's calculations, and the development of scientific warfare were not to have the precise effect that he foresees, he will be left, not only without a definition of morality for individuals—that his argument already lacks—but without any justification for morality in any sense.

BE GOOD, BECAUSE IT'S MORE FUN

If the " threat to civilization " I have talked of is as genuine as some declare and many more sense, it looks as though we shall have to return to the (3) type of argument ; " Be good, because it's more fun." It sounds, I said, absurd. But is it ? Of course, if we take " fun " as merely meaning a momentary and surface

titilation—the instance Mr. C. S. Lewis once gave was the pleasure of a good scratch—then it is absurd, but if we take it in the wider Chestertonian sense, as total and lasting satisfaction of body, mind and spirit, plus gusto, then it need not be so absurd as it sounds. (G. K. Chesterton, you remember, pities the solemn sceptic who rejects the Faith and loses the Fun.) I think that one of the main reasons why (3) appears to be absurd is that both Christians and would-be Christians make it absurd by going the wrong way about it. There is an air of strain in the behaviour of so many immature Christians, and still more of those Christian "seekers" who are trying quite conscientiously to arrive at Christian belief by practising Christian ethics. We must not despise this attempt. I often meet students, for instance, who have reached the point of seeing that behaviour is really groundless without the belief that explains it, and yet who are still puzzled as to how that belief (dogma) can be acceptable or even imaginable. And so they do the best they can at that stage, and practise the behaviour while temporarily pretending the belief. It is a conscientious attempt, but the result is a strained attitude. And yet, strangely, that strain is what they seem to think the Christian ethic is.

Constantly to be gearing oneself up to a high pitch of "doing good," and especially "doing good to others," is a nerve-stretching business. To be on your best behaviour for the awful tense hour when Aunt Matilda comes perennially to tea is bad enough. But to be on your best behaviour all your life because (to speak crudely) God is always there to tea, is too much. And then to go on to say that we must do this because it's "more fun," is patently absurd. But is this what Christian behaviour really implies?

If, instead of thinking of Christian morality in this high, suspended way, we think of it as man's part in the symphony of creation, we get the proportions better. Man responds freely to God, venturing no doubt in the dark yet not scrupulously and fussily for a reward, but in love and trust; then we see that his best behaviour is not in behaving at all but in loving. The non-Christian gets the various Christian moral commands out of focus, because he sees each as a separate thing standing on its own and looking very stark and forbidding in its isolation—the command to fidelity, the command to chastity, the command to honesty and charity and the rest. But the fact is that they all belong quite naturally to one central pattern and in that place become quite *inconspicuous*. I think that if we were ever to have caught one of the great Christian saints unawares and asked him about any one of the Christian virtues he pre-eminently showed—asked him, say, "Do you find it hard to practise fortitude?" he probably would have replied, disarmingly, "I don't know—I've never noticed." They were too busy to notice.

This gives one answer to those who ask how Christian dogma lying behind Christian behaviour is believable or imaginable; we may point to the New Testament, and from there point on to the lives of Christian saints all through history, and say, "Isn't *that* believable, imaginable?" For there it is that we seem to see what St. Augustine meant when he said, daringly, "Love—and do what you will." There is a care-free, unselfconscious gaiety about their lives—the best of them—which is anything but a studied good behaviour, the product of an ethic-calculating machine. The great Christians were not constantly running along the bank shouting through a megaphone to themselves rowing in the boat, "Give her ten."

THE TRUE MOTIVE OF CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOUR

This gives us the true motive of Christian behaviour, and one which is not affected by the changing social situation, the crises and tensions of history. The reply of the sceptic to the old (2) method of presenting Christian morality is to-day "If all is to go up in smoke anyway, why should I bother about what is best for society? Let us eat and be merry; let us at least prepare a good bonfire of pleasure." The Christian answer to that must be: "Pleasure? But here, not where you are looking, is real pleasure." The Christian, too, is "out to have a good time," and knows what a good time really is; it is joy and the acceptance of tragedy, it is self-fulfilment and asceticism, it is sacrifice and responsibility, it is utter abandonment and a sense of humour—all these things together, and compatible together, because all rolled into one act of love. How could these things be compatible together? Yet we see that they are in the lives of great Christians. How could St. Paul say, without any suspicion of bravado, that he "gloried in tribulation"? Or, to take at random an instance nearer our time, how could Father William Doyle, writing from the midst of terrible conditions in the trenches in 1916, say, "I am learning here better every day that there is no life of happiness like one full of 'hard things' borne for the love of God"? How this is so is hard to explain to those who do not already know it and unnecessary for those who do. The only way the Bible can express it is in theological terms, and it can't be put merely in psychological language; for although this state of spiritual happiness, of generosity and peace may resemble other states which the psychologist analyses, that analysis does not explain *how* these things should be. St. Paul when he talks about Christian behaviour only mentions the "Virtues" by the way, as things that flow from the life of Christ which the Christian is allowed to share. "In Christ," "suffering with him," "buried with him," "risen with him"—here are some of the expressions he uses. But this is not vague high-flown theological language for something that

could be, and for modern man should be, put otherwise. For the danger of neglecting the theological language is that we then so easily slip back into the fallacy I pointed out above—that of treating these "Virtues" or states as separate things, each to be striven for for its own sake; and then follows the fallacy of thinking that *we* can strive to attain them by ourselves (what the Christians call "without Grace"). These are fallacies, for if the highest virtue is an unself-conscious virtue, how can we consciously strive to be unselfconscious? The very idea is a contradiction. Only as we can say, "I live—yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," can we get anywhere near to that pattern of life which we (and even non-Christians) see in the Christ, and which we (as unsuccessfully as they) try to imitate.

It was impossible to write that paragraph without using the word "risen." St. Paul, too, found it a word he could not get away from: it is at the heart of the Christian faith. If the word is untrue, then the most we can ever hope to offer people is a doubtful (2) kind of argument for good behaviour—always doubtful in face of death, still more doubtful to-day in face of frequent, sudden and widespread death. In the Bible, however, "death" is more than a mere prelude to the mortuary: it is the logical conclusion of a life apart from God, and applies to souls as well as bodies. But if Christians are right, and Christ rose, conquering all kinds of death, then our life in him is already here an overcoming of the deathly elements in this world. It is an overcoming of the fear of death: also of apathy at dissolution (more popular to-day). It makes death more serious again—more serious, for instance, than pain; yet at the same time it makes death a vanquished enemy.

Again I have had to use theological words to explain theological language! But what comes out of it all should be clear and simple enough: the Christian knows how to "have a good time" in the deepest sense of "good" because he shares in the joy of Christ. Even at the "social service" level of behaviour that is clear. Mrs. Herman pointed out long ago (in *Creative Prayer*) that the "slum worker" was effective not in merely alleviating suffering, relieving poverty and the rest—all negative things—but in creating an atmosphere in which faith and hope are possible. "His pity purges the fœtid spiritual atmosphere; his devotion propagates itself and kills the noisome growths of selfishness." And at the "theological" level, which is below all others, the Christian doctrine of creation gives us the most practical basis for the whole process. G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown once said that he would thank God for his creation even if he knew he was to be damned eternally. This is a paradoxical way of putting it; and perhaps a fallacious way, since one who knew he was to be damned eternally would hardly have enough good left in him to be able to recognize creation as good.

St. Augustine's statement of it was sounder, that it is better to have existed and be annihilated than never to have existed at all. What God made was good : and in so far as we are restored to our first places in the orchestra of creation, our good behaviour is " good " just simply and in itself—not good for society, or good for ourselves or good for God, but just " good." We play this music not by listening to our own noises, but by following the score with one eye on the conductor ; and the music is not good " for " anything—it is just good. Of course we need not be here at all ; it is always open to us to decline our own existence. But being here we may as well do what we are here to do ; and to behave Christianly is to obey the law of our own ultimate being, so that it is a behaviour worth while in itself, the best and the happiest quite apart from what it does to others. This account might seem incompatible with the phraseology of some Christian writers, who talk, like St. Paul, in terms of warfare, striving, athletics, and the rest. It might seem incompatible, for instance, with the famous remark of Father Benson of Cowley, who when the Salvation Army Captain asked him whether his religion brought him peace, replied, " No—War." But a war against " Sin, the Flesh, and the Devil," should, in spite of the horrid associations which accompany the word, be by definition a happy war. And to be a part of God's creation at all is matter for infinite doxology. I do not know where in recent literature the matter has been better stated than by Mr. W. H. Auden in that fine, but as yet little understood or appreciated, Christmas Oratorio, *For the Time Being*. It is in a chorus of the three shepherds, who have not yet seen the Vision, but are expecting something strange, and yet are still troubled by the voices of the world :—

Levers nudge the aching wrist ;
" You are free
Not to be,
Why exist ? "
Wheels a thousand times a minute
Mutter, stutter,
" End the self you cannot mend,
Did you, friend, begin it ? "
And the streets
Sniff at our defeats.
Then who is the Unknown
Who answers for our fear
As if it were His own
So that we reply
Till the day we die :
" No, I don't know why,
But I'm glad I'm here."

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